

VZCZCXRO1959  
RR RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV  
DE RUEHSL #0790/01 2701401  
ZNY SSSSS ZZH  
R 271401Z SEP 06  
FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0326  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 0012  
RUEHGB/AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD 0053  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BRATISLAVA 000790

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

FOR EUR/NCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/27/2026

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AF](#) [IZ](#) [LO](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVAK PRIME MINISTER, IN AFGHANISTAN, PLEDGES  
CONTINUED TROOP PRESENCE

Classified By: DCM Lawrence R. Silverman for Reason 1.4(B) and (D).

11. (S) SUMMARY: Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico traveled to Afghanistan on September 27 to meet with NATO/ISAF commanders and Afghan officials to discuss Slovakia's future military contributions to Afghan reconstruction. The one day trip included Slovakia's Ministers of Defense and Interior (COMMENT: The Minister of the Interior was ostensibly there to explore the possibility of conducting police training, although it is more likely he was on a "boys with toys" trip after being passed over for the position as Minister of Defense in July. END COMMENT). Slovakia, which currently has an engineering unit and 16 deminers active at Kabul International Airport, agreed to a NATO request to redeploy to the southern city of Kandahar to participate in a broader reconstruction effort to involve both horizontal and vertical construction, but requested additional support with force protection. The trip resulted in comprehensive press coverage, including media-friendly images of the Prime Minister -- in military uniform -- engaging in a lively pick-up soccer game with Slovak troops. It also likely reinforced a political strategy Fico seems to be developing, in which increased Slovak efforts and attention on Afghanistan seeks to affirm the new government's commitment to the international community, while making good on Fico's campaign promise to withdraw a demining unit from Iraq. END SUMMARY.

WHAT THE PRIME MINISTER HEARD  
-----

12. (C) In meetings with ISAF commanders in the field, Fico became familiar with the role Slovakia's 56 demining and engineering troops have played in securing and rebuilding Kabul's international airport. ISAF is moving to the northern side of the runway to permit the further development of commercial air activities on the southern side, an important contribution to the country's economic redevelopment. Despite the progress that has been made and estimates that the demining of Kabul's airport will be completed in December, ISAF commanders told the PM that the effort to secure and rebuild Afghanistan's critical infrastructure will likely take years.

13. (C) Much of the discussion with ISAF officials revolved around the redeployment of Slovak troops to Kandahar to participate in broader engineering and construction efforts. Slovak troops told the visitors that they are concerned that the proposed redeployment to Kandahar will raise significant force protection issues, as their current vehicles --lightly

armored at best -- offer nearly no protection to troops traveling outside military bases. Slovakia will explore deploying additional "Alligator" armored vehicles, and ISAF has already committed to assisting with force protection during transit to Kandahar (which would be done by air, to minimize exposure to ambush). The unit will also likely be staffed up to the company level (100-120 troops) when moved to Kandahar.

#### SLOVAKIA FLOATS POSSIBILITY OF POLICE TRAINING...

-----

¶4. (S) During several meetings, Fico introduced his longtime political ally Robert Kalinak, Minister of Interior, as being there to explore the possibility of Slovak police officers participating in support or training for Afghan police. This idea -- which has never been mentioned before -- is not likely credible; it is more likely that Kalinak, who sought the position as Minister of Defense following the elections, came along on the trip because of his sheer personal interest in a "cool trip." In fact, Kalinak -- who is not a pilot -- was allowed to take the controls of the Prime Minister's aircraft on the return flight from Kabul to Bratislava.

#### ...AND THE DONATION OF MORE MATERIEL

-----

¶5. (C) Slovak officials also received thanks and praise from Afghan officials for their donation of materiel (with USG transport assistance) to Afghan security forces. Slovakia has yet to transfer 40,000 artillery rounds to Afghanistan, but the PM and his staff mentioned that they stand ready to donate additional materiel -- including

BRATISLAVA 00000790 002 OF 002

ammunition and 10,000 Kalashnikov rifles -- to the country.

#### COMMENT: THE VIEW FROM PLANET FICO

-----

¶6. (S) PM Fico told ISAF commanders that he was impressed by how "safe" Iraq seemed during his visit there, and that recent reports of increased suicide and IED attacks in Afghanistan make him believe the country is more dangerous than Iraq. The commanders, clearly at a loss for a response, described Afghanistan generally as a larger country with a larger population and fewer roads and transportation infrastructure. Fico repeatedly told interlocutors that he keeps hearing "what a great job" Slovak troops in Afghanistan are doing, while expressing his belief that troops in Iraq are not being used efficiently. It appears that Fico has adapted his worldview to justify withdrawal of the deminers from Iraq next year and deployment of additional forces to Afghanistan, in order to make good on his campaign promises while at the same time demonstrating "sophistication" and engagement to the international community. END COMMENT.  
VALLEE